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ABSTRACT

General testing guidelines for experienced and new testing personnel, teachers, and school administrators are presented. The Testing Code of Ethics is intended to enhance the awareness of school personnel regarding proper testing procedures and to emphasize the unrelenting attention necessary to provide accurate test data for decision making. Aspects of the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program that are essential to fulfilling the testing mandate are: test security; test administration; scoring; reporting; and interpreting results. Specific points are discussed in each of these areas. It is crucial that teachers and administrators adhere to certain standards in fulfilling testing responsibilities. These recommended practices include: (1) being factual in discussing standardized tests; (2) fulfilling the requirements of the standard curriculum, and not focusing solely on preparing students for standardized testing; (3) encouraging students to do their best and not to worry about not knowing the answer to a test question; (4) informing students about characteristics of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests; (5) making students aware of tests and the material they cover without coaching on specific content; (6) avoiding the use of pressure or threats in presenting tests to students; (7) not attempting to raise test scores by excluding low-scoring students or groups of students from testing; (8) not using scores on standardized tests as a sole determinant of whether a student is retained or promoted; (9) considering weaknesses revealed by tests in curriculum planning; (10) using and interpreting tests correctly; and (11) limiting access to test results to those occasions when parents and guardians have a strong need, in which case, tests may be examined in the presence of a school representative. (SLD)

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TESTING CODE OF ETHICS

FOR NORTH CAROLINA TESTING PERSONNEL, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

INTRODUCTION

The *Testing Code of Ethics* addresses the special concerns that have surfaced in recent years regarding appropriate professional practices within the Statewide Testing Program. This document is intended to serve as a general guide for experienced as well as new testing personnel, teachers and school administrators. These standards are consistent with the ethics practiced by the education profession[1] and are considered a part of the functions reviewed in the performance appraisal instruments for public school employees issued by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction.[2] More importantly, failure to adhere to this code will result in less reliable data to use in decision-making. The intention of state uniform testing is to enable schools to extract the most reliable information attainable. Test data that are unreliable can lead to misunderstanding and unwise decisions about schools, programs, personnel and students.

Testing is an integral part of the educational experience of North Carolina students. When administered, interpreted and used properly, uniform-test results offer schools a good independent source of information. The North Carolina Statewide Testing Program is designed to:

- help schools evaluate programs and make curricular decisions;
- provide schools with information necessary to plan instruction;
- help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses of students and offer them a measure to chart student growth; and
- give parents an independent measure of their child's relative success in school.

The importance of commitment and adherence to this code by those associated with testing cannot be overstated.

The intent of this code is to enhance the awareness of school personnel regarding proper testing procedures and to stress the unrelenting attention necessary to provide accurate test data for decision-making.

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TESTING STANDARDS[3]

Following are aspects of the North Carolina Statewide Testing Program that are essential to fulfilling the testing mandate.

TEST SECURITY

1. School personnel responsible for the testing program should develop appropriate local policies and procedures to ensure maximum test security.

2. Test materials must be stored in a secure place, preferably under lock and key, prior to and following administration.

3. Only school personnel who have a legitimate need should have access to test materials. Test booklets or questions are not to be copied or paraphrased in any way for any reason without permission of the test publisher.[4]

4. School personnel responsible for the testing program should be properly instructed in test administration procedures and know the importance of strictly following the directions as outlined by the test publisher.

5. Before test administration, materials are to be carefully counted and distributed in an orderly fashion according to instructions provided with the test. After testing, all test booklets and answer sheets should be accounted for and returned to a secured facility or forwarded for scoring.

6. Any breach of security, loss of materials, failure to account for materials, or other deviation from acceptable security procedures should be reported immediately to the principal, local test coordinator and the local school superintendent.

TEST ADMINISTRATION

1. The person responsible for the school testing program must have formal training in the area of measurement and testing. It is this person's responsibility to instruct test administrators, proctors and others involved in the testing program on proper test administration procedures.

2. Administrators of standardized tests must rigorously follow the administrative procedures established by the publisher. Responsibilities include establishing a positive environment, reading the directions word for word (without modification), and strictly adhering to time schedules. Providing verbal and non-verbal clues, rephrasing directions, teaching items on the test or stopping in the middle of a test to teach something unfamiliar to students is not permitted. Any deviation from stated directions will make the session a non-standard administration and may result in that session's being declared a misadministration. Unless non-standard procedures are approved in advance, any divergence from the directions must be documented and reported to the principal, local test coordinator and local school superintendent.

3. Students and/or parents are to be given proper notification before testing and provided information on the purposes of a test and intended uses of the results.

4. Coaching of students on specific test content or dissemination of test materials (including reproductions or modifications) prior to testing is not permitted. Such procedures will make the results invalid. However, it is desirable to teach students general test-taking skills in order to make them aware of strategies that could enhance their performance on tests.

5. Students are not to be coerced or made to feel uncomfortable about a test. Such behavior is likely to produce stress in some students and may negatively influence their performance.

6. The testing environment is to be reasonably comfortable and well-lighted. There should be minimal opportunity for distraction. All materials to be used by students should be readable and understandable. Testing sessions must be monitored to ensure students' comfort, as well as to maintain proper administrative procedures.

SCORING

School personnel in charge of scoring must maintain the highest ethical standards. They must follow the scoring directions and routinely check results for accuracy. Scorers should be trained to recognize inappropriate or impossible scores. All score reports must be carefully labeled and dated.

REPORTING

1. Test scores must not be released to students, parents, legal representatives, teachers or the media without appropriate interpretations and supporting guides. Materials dealing with test results should provide the following: a.) a description of the test; b.) a description of the subject matter covered; c.) the meaning of the scores; d.) a warning about common misinterpretations; and e.) the intended use of scores. Special effort should be made to avoid attaching unwarranted connotations to group IQ or grade- equivalent scores.

2. School personnel who have the responsibility for disseminating test results should have a thorough understanding of the test manuals, handbooks, user's guides and technical reports.

3. Individual test scores are best presented as approximations and not as absolutes. It is preferable to report results as a limited score range rather than as points.

4. Although test construction includes reviews to eliminate or minimize test bias, tests should be reviewed for potential bias, and test results qualified if sources of bias have affected the scores of a particular individual, gender, group or class.

5. Test scores are to be presented as one source of information about a student or group of students and should not be used alone for placement, referral, and other consequential decisions on the education of a student.

6. When cutoff scores are used as part of a scheme to select, classify or certify students, the method and rationale for arriving at that cutoff score must be supported by research with documentation available for review.

INTERPRETING RESULTS

1. School personnel must not attempt to interpret test data before studying and fully understanding a test manual that includes information on a.) administration and scoring; b.) norms and related technical features; c.) reliability; and d.) validity. Assistance in interpretation should be sought from the test publisher or other expert personnel if necessary.

2. School personnel must be acutely aware of the limitations of test data and not assert relationships between instructional strategies and test performance that are unsupported by empirical evidence.

3. Those interpreting test results are to be aware of ethnic and cultural differences among students and the impact that these differences may have on test results. The status of a student in comparison to a norm group can be supplemented by sub-group norms for similar groups of students. Also, equal emphasis can be given to growth trends rather than to normative comparisons.

4.Unless a means can be established and statistically supported which controls the many factors that influence student test results, test scores should not be used in formal teacher or principal evaluations. When test results are used as part of teacher self-analysis, teachers and their supervisors are expected to focus on areas of excellence, as well as areas in need of improvement. All analyses must be done cautiously with reasonable expectations being set as goals for students and schools. Teachers who perceive coercion to raise students' test scores may pressure their students with unrealistic demands, thereby creating anxiety and apprehension to the detriment of the students' adjustment and feelings of self worth. Appropriate mechanisms should be established for teachers and other school personnel through existing channels to address unrealistic demands.

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1 *National Education Associations' Code of Ethics of the Education Profession, National Association of School Psychologists' Principles for Professional Ethics.*

2 *Function 8 of the Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument; Functions 3A & B of the Principal Performance Appraisal Instrument; Functions 5 & 6 of the School Counselor Performance Appraisal Instrument; and Function 1 of the School Psychologist Performance Appraisal Instrument.*

3 *See Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1985) published by the American Psychological Association; Ethical Standards (1981), published by the American Association for Counseling and Development; and Principles for Professional Ethics (1984), published by the National Association of School Psychologists.*

4 *The test publisher is Research and Testing Services, NCDPI in most instances.*

STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Teachers and administrators play an important role in preparing students for standardized testing. As a result, student performance or reaction to testing is greatly influenced by the perceptions of teachers. Consequently, it is crucial that teachers and administrators display a positive attitude towards testing. Listed below are 11 practices that teachers and administrators should adhere to in fulfilling their testing responsibilities.

1. When discussing standardized tests with students or parents, teachers and administrators have a responsibility to be factual. Personal opinions of teachers and administrators, whether positive or negative, should be channeled to appropriate professional personnel for review and clarification.

2. Teachers and administrators are to fulfill the requirements of the Standard Course of Study. Instructional content should not be geared solely to preparing students to score well on standardized tests.

3. Students must be encouraged to do their best and instructed not to worry if they do not know the answer to a test question. As teachers cover the content in the Standard Course of Study, students are expected to show their level of mastery on standardized tests of this curriculum; however, there will always be some test materials that will not be covered and may be unfamiliar to students.

4. Students should be informed about characteristics of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests (i.e., norm-referenced tests indicate the performance of a student relative to his/her peers; criterion-referenced tests, on the other hand, seek to ascertain whether students have mastered particular skills or objectives). Generally, cut-off levels, if applicable, are set by the State Board of Education. Students scoring below the cut-off level may be required to undergo further testing, diagnosis or instruction to identify weaknesses more precisely and help them reach a level of competence.

5. Students are to be informed of upcoming tests, told what to expect and given an opportunity to become familiar with the types of questions covered on the test. However, they are not to be drilled or coached on specific test content. It is important that students receive guidance and training in test-taking skills and anxiety-reducing techniques.[1]

6. Under no circumstances are students to be coerced or threatened with failure if their performance is not as desired. Any perceived pressure to increase academic performance and therefore raise test scores must not be transmitted to students. One of the tenets of effective teaching is that all students are expected to give their best on all school-related work, which includes standardized testing.

7. Teachers and administrators may not attempt to raise test scores of a particular class or cohort by excluding low-scoring students or groups of students from testing.

8. Scores on standardized tests must not be the sole determinant of whether a student is to be retained or promoted. The Basic Education Program (BEP) specifies a three-phase promotion testing program in grades 3, 6 and 8 to assist students who score below the 25th national percentile for their grade level.

9. The curriculum is not to be taught simply to raise test scores. The weaknesses of students as revealed by test scores are expected to be considered in curriculum planning.

10. Test publishers must provide information on their test's strengths and weaknesses. However, the ultimate responsibility for appropriate use and interpretation belongs to the test users. It is important that teachers consult with the school psychologist, testing coordinator or other personnel with advanced training in tests and measurement for clarification of test scores.

11. Access to tests must be limited, but on rare occasions a parent or guardian who indicates a strong need to examine a test may do so in the presence of a school representative.

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[1] *Teachers and school administrators should consult the school system's testing coordinator if further assistance is needed in preparing students for testing or analyzing their testing results.*